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"Stranded, her nose beaten deep in the sand,
and all battered and broken a noble ship lay."

Rosaline Fay

A Southern Idyl

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PART FIRST

DOWN in the land where the flowers are censers
and all of the breezes are acolyte boys,
Swinging their censers and flinging the fragrance
wherever they flit on their fond fairy feet,
Down where all hearts are as warm as the roses that
redden the flowery riots of June,
Under the moon of the merry May heavens a baby
girl came from the land of the Blest;
Came when the lips of the cannon were speaking
the thunderous phrasing of fire and shell;
Came when the highways and byways and hedges, the
meadows and cottonfields over the land
Sprinkled had been by the High Priest of Battle with
hyssop branch dipped in the blood of the best.
Warm on its lips the last kiss of its father, his footfalls
were echoing down the lone street.
Set was his face where the breath of the cannon hung
heavy and grey o'er the dry, fallow fields,
Set for the pallet and tent of the soldier, where patriots
pray in the language of deeds.

That was the last of him,—last of the father;— his
shadow ne'er fell on the threshold again.
Sleeping, he slept on the mountains of Georgia, the
stars peeping down at the blood on his breast.
Hushed were the bold, brazen lips of the cannon, and
broken forever the rank and the file;
Tattered and bloody, the bonnie blue banner was
laid in the grave o'er the hearts of its dead.
Hundreds came back from the battles and prisons, all
wasted and wounded and scarred to the bone;
Thousands remained with the sod for their tenting,
awaiting the final reveille to sound.

Scarce had the embers of tent-fires blackened, than
God sent the Angel of Vengeance abroad.
Run, O ye maidens whose lovers have perished, and
run, O ye mothers! whose husbands are dead!
Fly, little children, whose fathers and brothers are
sleeping the sleep that the swift bullet brought!
Speed away! Speed away! Speed while ye can or may!
Fever, the grim Yellow Fever has come.
Spectre of Evil! O Grim Yellow Fever! Away with your
ominous vomit of black!

Off with your jaundicing, skeleton fingers! Away with the
glare that delirium brings!
War, with his sabres and bullets and battles, took pity
on women and children at least!
Heartless One! Grim Sulphur Devil, I call you, O dread
Yellow Fever! no pity have you!
Stretching his arms like a skeleton demon, he held the
lone mother close, close to his breast;
Pressing his fleshless mouth hard to her ruby lips,—
kissing, he poisoned her heart with the plague.
Out 'mid the roses and lilies the little maid romp'd in
her merriment, played in her glee.
Down by the flower-beds out through the gate-way, the
mother was borne, and the nurse followed next,
Left in the lilies amid the red roses, the sweet little
orphan-girl, Rosaline Fay.

Perished a neighboring household beside her, all, all,
save the mother, were dead in a week.
Surfeiting sorrow in deep desolation, she snatched
to her bosom maid Rosaline Fay;
Took her to love her, a pattern of beauty, a something
to fill up the void in her heart.

Then she arose from her sorrowing hearthstone, she
the kind neighbor, the gentle Mathilde;
Down to the courts took the fair little Rosaline, told how
had perished her kindred and friends;
Brought all the papers bespeaking her fortune and
pleaded in guardianship named she might be.
Then went the order that made her the guardian, yea,
made her, the gentle soul, keeper in trust.
Home then with wondering eyes took she the maiden
the dear little elf-child, the sweet Rosaline,
Gave up her life to the growth of the flower the grim
Yellow Fever had dashed at her feet.
She would be mother, and tutor, companion, and
playmate.—yea, everything best to the child;

Straight then departing she left the great city, went
down to a village all quiet and quaint,
Down to a village and into a mansion where first she
had heard the lone mocking-bird sing.
Seating herself where a muscodine screening kept softly
the balcony clear of the sun,
Spake she, the gentle, to Rosaline Fay, while the
wondering-eyed maiden stared into her face;

"Heaven has left me alone in the wide world, has sent
the Dark Angel to gather my flowers;
Battle and fever the wild work accomplished,—my
husband, my children, my kindred are gone.
Mother and father of yours they have perished; and you
are alone,—in the wide world alone!
You, little cherub, I take to my bosom and all that I have
when I pass shall be yours.
Now, dainty maiden, I ask but a little from you in return
for the love that I give:
Try but to love me;—I love you already,—and call me
your mother from henceforth and on."
Then did the pretty eyes, swimming in liquid, look love
that a human pen never can tell.
Through the red rosy lips floated a music half spoken,
half whispered, that came from the soul:
"Mother" and lo! the light arms were uplifted, and
clasped round the neck of the gentle Mathilde;
Lips that had muttered it lay on the kindly lips,
tighter and tighter she clung to her neck;—
Clung as her soul would rush out from her body to leap
to the soul of the kindly Mathilde.
Down the soft cheeks rolled the dew of two sorrows,
the lone childless mother's,—the motherless child's;—

Clasping each other in half-spasm fashion, their spirits
rushed into affinity there.

"Ask," spake the mother, "whatever you wish, and
yours, little daughter, at once shall it be."

"Mother," the little lips quivered and quivered, "Oh!
teach me to be just as kind as are you."

Thus to the mansion upon the black bayou, she came,
the sweet maiden, the child Rosaline,

Thus to the heart of the woman who sorrowed, the
child of affection, sweet Rosaline came.

Soft passed the May months and she was eleven; beneath
the sweet teacher how kind she had grown!

Never a wish, nor a thought but for others, who did
her a favor by taking her deeds.

Beautiful soul in a beautiful body, a wonder of gentleness,
sweetness and grace.

Bright was her hair,— like the gold of the yellow moon,
flowing adown as a waterfall flows;

Splinters, and needles, and streaks of gold gleaming
a-through it, and up it, and down when she moved.

Tinted her face like the wheat when it's ripened and
waits for the sickle to lay it alow.

Liquid her eyes like blue agates in water, her lips
perfect bows that a cupid might use.
Dressed in a changing silk, standing in sunlight, a fairy
incarnate some poet had dreamed.
Beautiful soul in a beautiful body, she knew not her
sweetness so good was her heart.

Down to the village church passed she each morning for
now was the Curé preparing the young;
Making them ready for childhood's sweet moment
when Jesus should first lay His Heart on their breasts.
Soon neared the day; and the joy of the mother had
brought whitest silks from the city for her.
Gently she asked for the simplest of garments; for
why should she shine far above all the rest.
Others would feel all the sting of their poverty.. "Please,
let me be like my classmates for once."
Gladder than ever and proud of her daughter, the
mother bent down to the wish of the child;
Bade her to follow the bent of her wishes, to do with
the silks whatsoever she would.
Scarce had the words from her lips half been uttered,
when down to the village the riches were sent.

Bright beamed the morning;— the best of all mornings
that ever is met in the days of a child.

Wonder of wonders! the sick widow's daughter is
beaming in richest of satins and silks!

Marvel of marvels! the rich lady's daughter angelic
she seemeth in plainest of gowns!

Onward and onward, the earth wheeling onward had
seven times circled its path round the sun.

Eighteen had come to the meek little maiden that
played in the roses and lilies of May.

All of the promise of personal beauty had ripened and
blown to a fulness secure.

Fair as the fairest, and tall as a lily; a lady-like lady,
the sweet Rosaline.

Looked she like one that had stepped from the pages
that tell of the tournaments where fought the Cid.

Stately she moved as a star in the Heavens and
modesty mantled her face and her form.

Often the mansion now throbbed to the music when
twinkling toes stepped to a measured tattoo.

Often the sons and the daughters of planters were
gathered therein for an evening of mirth.

Never a soul ever passed from her presence but holier
felt for the smile on her face.

Matrons and maidens, the young men and aged, not
one could account for the spell that she worked.

Hidden in earth are the roots of the rosebush, and they
are the source of the rose's perfume.

Right was the heart of the stately young maiden.—

the fountain, the spring of her sweet, simple grace.

Piety kept her as pure as a lily, and prayer made her
spirit as warm as a rose.

PART SECOND

ROSALINE now often sat 'neath a plum tree,
a-crooning and singing old melodies sweet;
Roses beside her; her feet in the mosses; a
calico gown and sun-bonnet long
Shading her face from the sun's stolen kisses,
a-waiting and watching for Victor to come.
There 'neath the plum tree that grew by the gateway,—
ah! there they had made to each other their troth.
Victor had wealth, and his acres were thousands; as
black as the bayou each foot of his land.
Proud was his father who boasted a lineage, reaching
far back to King Phillip the Good.
Never a stain in the stream of his people and never a
blot on a deed he had done.
Locked in the armour of honor and justice, his sturdy
soul strong in the sense of its right,
High set his frosty head; fearless his wrinkled brow;
God did he worship first, honor came next.
Deep had the father, his strong sense of honor, deep
chiseled, deep cut in the soul of his son;

Firm had the father set strong in his bosom a passionate
love for his family stream.

Victor still kept his bethrothal a secret; far down in his
heart's deepest chamber it lay,
Biding the time for the calmest unfolding, for,
anxious and nervous, he doubted assent.
She, at his bidding, kept locked in her bosom the troth
they had made, 'neath the moon of the May.
Sweeter their secret grew, sweeter, more honeyed, for
God alone knew, only God and themselves,
Flowers were fresher and daylight was brighter, and
all the wide world in a honey-dew steeped.
Angels they heard in the rustle of branches, the beautiful
world was an Eden to them.
"Listen," one day spake the mother to Rosaline;
"Listen, my child, to the things that I say.
Never were you half so glad with the wide world,
as lately you've grown with this poor earth of ours.
Brighter your eye than the gleam of the bayou; and
redder your cheeks than a ripe mellon's heart.
Scarcely a horse patters loud on the road-way, you flush
as you rush to the window to peep,

Tell me, my pretty one, tell me, my Rosaline,
 what is the meaning my child of all this?"

Red grew her face as her head she hung lowly,—
 a huge double rose overgrown on its stem,—

Tried hard to smile in the midst of confusion, then broke
 into tears at the futile attempt.

Startled, the mother her arms wound around her, and
 held on her shoulder the wet, weeping face.

Soothing, the voice that had wakened such sorrow, spoke
 words of regret and a kiss between each.

Tell me, my pretty one, tell me, my Rosaline,
 I know what it is; won't you trust me, my child?

Cupid has caught you! I'm sure that's the trouble,
 and Victor Le Grand is the choice of your heart!"

Laughing, she laughed in the midst of her weeping,
 confessed the soft truth, "but," she said, "'tis the half."

Harder and louder she sobbed in her crying; at last some
 control of her weeping she gained,

Told all the truth, that her promise was given, and
 Victor Le Grand was her husband to be.

"Then," quoth the mother, "may praise be to heaven! my
 prayer has been heard in its measure complete."

Poured then the tears of the joy of two spirits,
 the soul of the maiden in whirligig flew;

Joy in the sunlight and shadows and blossoms, and
all the wide world in a Sea of Joy steeped.

Of to the city where bendeth the river that shapeth
the crescent about the old town,
Of to the city long known as the "Crescent,"
intent on affairs went the lover Le Grand.
There did he go to a friend of his father's;—they romped
in their childhood for many a day;—
Often he went, for it savored of homelife; the curly
haired daughters were sweet and refined.
Laura, the eldest, had known him since boyhood; long,
long was she smitten with love for the boy;
Wondered why never she gained on his feelings, though
lavish indeed of each womanly art.
"Gain him I must!" she had sworn in her bosom,
"my father is poor; but Le Grand is so rich.
Nothing shall stop me—not all of the wide world for
Victor Le Grand shall be husband of mine!"
How she cajoled him! Oh, how she could flatter; she
loved every flower he mentioned as fair;
Artfully striving to gain from his heart but a look
or a smile to encourage her suit.

What was the matter! she wondered and wondered, for
out from the depth of his fathomless heart
Came not an echo to answer her shouting, though
hung o'er its brink she was calling his name!
Out from his pocket once fell a sealed letter, and writ
on its face was, "Miss Rosaline Fay."
Quick Laura stooped from the floor to pick it and asked,
as she handed it, who was the maid.
"Only a lady friend down on the bayou,"—but Laura
had sounded his fathomless heart!

Curly-haired Laura that night in her chamber sat
rocking and musing, and thinking of him.
All of his feelings full current was sweeping away to
another she never had seen.
What could she do that the stream of his passion
might set to her heart and away from this girl!
"What can I do?" and she patted her little foot light on
the rug by the fireplace near.
Oh, but to rouse him! to sour his love-sweets!
to fill all his soul with the acid of hate!
"Who is this lady? and whence comes this maiden?
this Rosaline Fay on the bayou below?

“Who is her father and who is her mother?

I’ll ask him tomorrow before he departs.

Hating, I hate her with all of my being; she stands
between me and the king of my soul!

Out from my path she must hasten away, or her shadow
will darken my soul evermore!”

Flashing, her eyes glimmered bright in the darkness;
she shook all her curls, and she set her white teeth.
Desperate, daring, her turbulent being grew brazen in
purpose, grew steeled in resolve.

Came the next evening, a warm tepid evening,— and
Victor Le Grand called to say his good-bye.

Laura was gayest, so airy and fairy like,—chiding and
joking him althrough the eve.

Standing, he stood; it was time he was going; and
kindly he bade to each kinder farewell.

Down to the gate with him Laura would go;
so she walked at his side o’er the path violet-fringed.
Then, as a parting word, laughing she muttered;

“Today I was told of a lady who lives

Down on the bayou,—a Rosaline Fay—and the blood
of a negro inhabits her veins!”

Startled, young Victor stood breathless and speechless!

His wide open eyes stared her full in the face.

"What said you, Laura? I heard you not truly; there's
negro blood flowing in Rosaline's veins!"

"Sure" said the maiden, who caught in his voice tone,
the measure complete of the blow she had struck;

"Sure" said the maiden and laughed a light treble,

"There's negro blood flowing in Rosaline's veins."

"Heaven forbid it!" half murmured, half muttered, then
grasped he his forehead, like one dizzy grown,
Said nothing more as in half-drunken fashion he turned
from her presence and passed down the street.

Stood she a moment, all trembling and watching him,
leaning full forward as held she the gate;

Saw him go staggering, swaggering onward, like one
on the edge of the Sea of Deep Sleep;

Slammed she the iron gate; wheeled on her dainty heel;
ran up the violet walk, up to the house.

Pattered her little feet, tapping each wooden step;
turning, she reached the retreat of her room.

Closed she the portal and quick shot the lock-tongue;
all trembling and fluttering and chuckling with glee,

Raised by the joy of a triumph unlooked for, she clapped
her pink palms, as she danced in her mirth.
What of the lie she told! what of the harm she did!
what of the lady she wronged by her lie!
Little cared she, for she snapped her frail fingers, and
crushed out the thought as you'd crush a grey gnat.

Rose the great golden robed, grand in its gleaming pride,
gilding the tree-tops and flashing the dew,
Waking the birds in old Houma to music and warming
the black bayou's wrinkleless face.
Smiled Rosaline; and the sky it was bluer, the sun
he was brighter than ever before.
Beaming he beamed on the steed of bright steel, with its
red heart of fire and its breath of white steam.
Speeding along o'er the thin threads of iron that led
from the Crescent to old Houma town.
Watched she the clock and she knew all the stopping
points; now he was there; then in this place, and that.
Bright eyes and rosy cheeks they were in Houma;
but pure mind and laughing heart rode on the train,
Rode on the train, until fancy made plain the sharp
clickety, clackety, clickety, clack,—

Rode till she felt she was swinging and swaying upon the
red cushions within the long car.

Oh! how the hours dragged! morning would never pass!

"Noon and the train they will never reach here."

Down to the plum tree that grew by the gateway, she
went, there to wait as the time grew apace.

There in the hush of the village noon stillness,

the grasshopper grated his musicless tune,

Shaking the leaves of the weeds on the roadside, as

leaping he sprang on the dank, scraggy things;

Then in the hush of the village noon stillness, afar came
the sound of the whistle long blown!

Rising amidst and above the live oaks, she could see the
white smoke of the steel breasted steed,

Bearing her Victor a-back from the city, a-back to the
quiet of old Houma town.

Turned she about and she sped to the gallery, stood on
the steps looking where bends the road,

Stood she in white, with a ribbon of blue on her long
flowing hair, and blue bows on her dress.

Stood she expectant and watched through the foliage,
watched for the coming of Victor Le Grand.

Then, as she saw his light sulky come speeding, she
started a-down to the gate once again,
Picking a red glory rose for a token to greet him,
the handsome young planter, she loved.
Reached she the gate as the trotter stood still; as he
stepped from the sulky, she opened the gate.
Full was the flood of her joy at the moment; she dropped
her red rose as she grasped both his hands.
He, for a moment, forgot his wild heartache beneath
the angelical light of her eyes.
Holy the joy that was writ in her features;— he felt
that her being was heaven's,—not his.
Then, like an avalanche, rushed on his spirit the word
that had shaken his soul to its roots;
Groaning, his agonized spirit outgroaned, 'neath the
full crushing thought as it pressed on his heart.
Speechless he stood;—in a stupor he stood;—not a word
could he speak, not a sign could he make!
Startled,—amazed, at his dull heavy eye, to a bench
by the plum-tree she led him away;
Up to the house for her mother she started; but grasped
he her wrist, and his head gave her nay;
Docily she at his motion obeyed; and beside him, took
seat on a bench 'neath the plum.

Then, with an effort that shook all his being, he turned
and he spake to her slowly and low:

“Proud is my father who boasts of a lineage, boasts
of descent from King Phillip the Good!
Pure as the sweet distillations of evening the red stream
of life in our bosoms that flows.
All of that life-stream, from all of the ages, is flowing
this moment in my purple veins.
Never the shadow of evil has crossed it. Now tell
me, my lady, oh! whence do you come?”
Then, in the marvelous tones of sweet candor, she told
that she knew not and never could know;
Told the strange story her mother had told her, the war
and the fever that left her alone.
“Then,” spake young Victor, “mean rumor hath sprinkled
a negro’s poor blood in the blood of your heart!”
Silent a moment, her angel soul rose to the height of its
grandeur and made she reply:
“Victor, I bow to the pure stream of life-blood
untainted that flows from King Phillip the Good;
So do I love you, that not for the universe would I
dare clash with the least wish of yours.

If, ere the morning, I cannot plain show you from
 whence comes the blood in my poor purple veins,
Free shall you be from the promise you've made me, and
 I all alone shall walk down to my grave.
Go, now, and seek some repose and forget me;
 tomorrow will find me prepared for the worst.
Freedom is yours if I fail to unravel the dark tangled
 skein of my ancestral line!"

Trembling, his frame shook; he spake not a word;
 but he pressed to his lips the soft lily-white hand;
Rising, he dashed away; sprang to his sulky seat,
 drove like a demon in chase of a soul.

Slowly she rose in her gown of pure white, and she
 sought the retreat of her own quiet room;
Went to her cabinet, took all the papers there,—waxen
 and yellow and stained by the years;
Sat by the window, forgot all the sunshine, forgot
 all the grasshoppers' chirrups and songs.
Read o'er the papers, and read and re-read them,
 but never a hint could she find,—ne'er a word,—
Never a hint to betoken her lineage whence came her
 father, her mother nor theirs.

Then to the kindly Mathilde straight the maiden, the
gentle, the saintly, the sweet Rosaline,
Praying, once more she reveal her the story of all
that she knew of her parents and her.
Slowly the wrinkled old lady began, and retold the sad
story so often rehearsed.
Dark and as black as the depths of the ocean, the
mystery still unrevealed did remain.

Rose then the maiden and under a live oak she sat
in the shadow and white grew her face,—
White as the soft snowy tint of her garment, with
ribbons of blue all down the neat front.
Musing and brooding!—ah! never before had a cloud
thrown its shadow across her bright path!
Then she arose, and her sunbonnet taking, she set her
fair face for the church in the town,
Where on her knees, like a penitent sinner, before
the Madonna she knelt her to pray.
Prayed,—for it seemed that the bitterest nightfall was
rounding a day that had wakened in joy;
Prayed,—for the earth had no comfort to give her and
heaven alone could endow her with strength;

Prayed,—for the light of her life was departing,
the blackest of gloom spreading thick o'er her soul.
Bent down her head and her heart, as accepting the
clay of dead hopes that had late breathed so strong.
Felt the full weight of the woe on her soul. And
the Angels of God whispered comfort to her!
Then she arose, and a-down the lone roadway o'er which
in the morning so happy she looked,
Faced for her home: And the bright sun was sinking,
the nightbirds preparing their nocturnes to sing.

Oh, the long weary night! Up came the mellow moon,
flung her soft yellow light over all things.
Rosaline sat as it rose in the east; and its mild,
softened beams kissed the folds of her dress,
Rosaline sat when it sank in the west, and the first streak
of dawn put a tint on the sky.
Rising, she passed down the dewy damp road; and her
face was as pale as the lily she plucked;
Entered the church; and her lily she placed at the
foot of the shrine of the Mother of Love.
Prayed but for strength to sustain her lone heart in
the moment of agony drawing so near.

Passed from the portal, and made for the mansion
where Victor Le Grand was the master supreme.

Him did she find in a grove of pecan trees, a-seated and
sad with his dog at his feet.

Straight to him made she, her heart never failing. He
rose when he saw the white figure approach;

Rushed all the blood to his face; and his impulse was
down on his knees in a reverent awe.

Heavens! how fair she was! holiness dripping at every
slow step and from every white fold!

Queenly!—majestic!—earth never knew being sublime
in such beauty as Rosaline Fay.

Reached him, she put on his shoulders her hands,
and the white chalky face set its eyes on the red.

Then like the beat of a bell that is tolling, so measuredly
fell the sad words from her lips:

“Victor, I cannot say nay to the charge that the blood
of a negro empurples my veins.

War-plague and fever laid low in the earth the sweet
beings that gave me the blood in my heart.

Tangled—nay, broken and lost are the threads of my
ancestral line; and I know naught of it.
Not for the world would I dare to betray you,
nor ask you to wed me beneath this reproach.
Take then your liberty, free from the promise you
made 'neath the May moon beside the plum tree.
Take it; and with it I give you this token, I ne'er gave to
man and I never shall give.”
Moving slight forward she kissed his high forehead;
then turned on her heel, and she hastened away.
Staggered, he saw her glide from him and vanish before
the full weight of the deed she had done
Fell on his mind; then, the sense of her virtue,
suspicion all blighted, embittered to gall!
All of the mystery wrapping her story, a ruse but to hide
the dark taint in her blood!
What! she had kissed him! a negress had kissed him!
the high-blooded son of King Phillip the Good!
Quick from his pocket his kerchief he snatched and the
spot where she kissed how he rubbed and he rubbed;
Dashed on the ground the white linen and stamped it;
and pale all his face, and indignant, he passed.

PART THIRD



WINGING in golden light, speeding and turning,
the round rugged earth circled twice the old sun.

Lightning had blasted and shattered the plum tree
that heard the bethrothal young Victor had made.

Weary of Houma, the stately young lady, the fair

Rosaline set her face for the North.—

Weary, oh! weary the gentle young creature, departed
in grief from the home of her youth.

Came to the beach where the crystalline waters of
Michigan washes its pebbles and sands.

There, in a cottage the moods of the sea,—when
it glasses the stars on its rippleless breast.

There, when it danced and its surface was freckled
with patches of grey or of green or of blue,—

Sat she and studied the moods of old Michigan;—
else the wide void in her poor, lonely heart.

Once on a sunny noon,—cool Sabbath sunny noon,—
by the kind, gentle one, wrinkled Mathilde,

Sat she regarding old wrinkleless Michigan, glowing
with golden light, silent and still:—
When from the east sprang an ominous leaden cloud,—
Rolling and rumbling it rushed on, advanced,—
Dragging its length, like a black dismal garment, that
spread o'er the blue of the heavens its black,
Hiding the face of the great garish noon sun, and
flashing the sword of its lightning abroad.
Airy the wind's rigid fingers uplifted the waves from the
breast of the sea where they slept,
Set them all racing and rolling and rumbling and
curling and churning and splashing the foam;
Stiff blew the eastern wind; down came the awful rain;
colder and colder and colder it grew;
Rattling and clatt'ring the fall of the hail beat a treble
tattoo on the earth and the sea,
Then when it passed came the white hissing snow;
and it filled all the heavens and choked up the sea.
Oh! it was awful! the day in its prime 'neath the wand
of the Storm Spectre changed into night!
Stronger the wind blew and blacker each moment grew:
Came then the darkest night earth had e'er seen,
Never a star nor a flash of the lightning, but only an
ebon night filled with the snow.

Midnight had passed; and the voice of the wind sank
 alow and alow as the morning approached.
Breaking, the clouds drifted off to the west and
 the sun put a pale purple hue on the east.
Slowly he rose from the waves of the deep just as
 Rosaline rushed from her cottage snow-crowned.
Skipped o'er the wide scattered patches of white as
 she breathless made haste to the ice-edged lake.
There was the deed that the midnight had sheltered!—
 Yea, there was the deed that the Storm King had done!
Stranded, her nose beaten deep in the sand,
 and all battered and broken a noble ship lay,
Dead on her deck; on the sand; in the sea!—oh! the
 ice-coated dead were around everywhere!
Lashed to the rigid and hoar-gleaming mast, with her
 stiff gaid lips drawn a-back from her teeth,
Eyelids uplifted, the glassy balls set in the fathomless
 blue of the sky overhead.
Frosted in frozen spray, crusted her garments in stiff
 brittle mail of the gleaming white ice,
There was the cold frozen form of a woman, her frigid
 hands grasping a casket of gems.
Terrified, Rosaline gazed on the figure that moved when
 the bulk swayed to right or to left!

Saw not the ice-covered jewels that flashed, or
the eardrops and necklaces, bracelets and rings,—
Saw but the glare of the sun on the ice, and the dead
on the shore, and the dead on the deck.
Turning about, rushed she back to her cottage, and sent
the alarm to the neighbors around.
Soon came they all, and they looked for a spark,
for a gleam of life-light in the breasts of the dead.
Down in the hulk one they found, and his pulse
fluttered weak, but it beat and they bore him aloft,—
Up to the cottage where Rosaline Fay and the gentle
Mathilde had prepared to attend
Those in whose veins but a ripple of warmth might
be flowing and ebbing its slow course along,
Those whom the searchers might find in the boat.
And they found only him; and they bore him aloft.

Stiff to the mast with her jewels upon her, the white,
frozen face to the clear sky above,
Bound in the bands of the ice she had perished,
the wife with the jewels she loved as her life!
Here in the cottage, the husband unconscious, who
dowered the wife with the jewels she prized,

Here in the cottage, as pale as the linen that covered
the pillow his head pressed upon!

You was the curly haired lady who lied to the planter
who loved the sweet Rosaline Fay.

Here was the planter who loved the sweet Rosaline,
trusted the liar and took her to wife.

Days followed days; and he raved in his fever;

he raved and he raved of the days that were gone;

By him she sat, the sweet, kindly young lady, and only
her hand brought the drink to his lips;

Cooled off the fevered brow, chaffed the hot fevered
hands, heard him make love to her over again;

Talk of the future as once he had talked ere the
snake-tongue of Laura had poisoned his heart.

Then would he break into passionate fury and call
down the curses of heaven on high.

"Liar," he'd cry in the storm of his passion, "you lied
to me, Laura, you lied for my gold!

Liar, you've wronged her whom heaven meant for me!

Accursed be your fate wheresoever you roam!"

Then to her knees would the golden haired lady, quick
fall as she lifted her pure heart in prayer,

Praying that heaven might soothe his wild ravings,
while swelled out to whipcords the veins on his brow.

So passed a week, and the fever abated; one morning
he opened his eyes, and amazed,
Gazed on the face of the liquid eyed lady who sat
there beside him so patient, so kind!
Spake not a word only looked in her face; and he looked,
and he looked,—and he wept as he looked.
Spake not a word for the long week that followed, but
looked all his thoughts through his eyes into hers.
Slowly the poor weakened frame won its strength back
and Victor Le Grand from his bed then arose.
Told she to him how the vessel had perished, and
how she had found the cold corpse of his wife;
Told how the crew had all died in the water; and he,—
only he,—lived to tell its sad tale.

Thrusting his hand in his pocket one morning, he
drew out a photograph warped and awry,
Handed it straight to the golden haired lady,
the saintly young maiden, the sweet Rosaline.

"Tell me," she said, "how you came by this picture;
'tis I when a baby of four dainty years;
Mate of it have I"—but ere she could finish he fell on his
knees and for pardon he craved,—
Pardon because of the wrong he had done her that
morning beneath the pecan trees alone;
Then he unravelled all, all that had happened, and told
how he wedded the adder-tongued maid;
Sailed to the fair realms of flowery France for the
honeymoon time with the maid he had wed.
There he had met an old silver haired Curé who lived
in the Sugar State long e'er the war.
Told how he left when the mouth of the cannon first
uttered its groaning of passion and rage,
Leaving behind him a sister who wedded a friend
of his youth, ere they left home and France.

"Six weary years with her letters were sprinkled, and
then came a day when he heard nothing more.
Showed me a picture that sister had sent her,
and asked were there hopes of his meeting with them.
Saw I the semblance; I knew it full well; for you often
had shown me your baby-hood type;

Then did I tell him I knew you, fair angel, and
promised to lead him to you, happy one;
Promised myself to your grandeur to bow, to bend down
my knee when your pardon I craved.
So were we homeward bound, sailing a-down the lake,
nearing the port when the storm came apace.
He, the old Curé, took out from his pocket this
picture of you and he gave it to me,—
Gave it when all of the death chill had struck him, and
perished with prayers to his God for his niece!
Sleeping, he slept in the ice and the waves; and she, the
deceiver, the lover of gold,
Perished before you, a spectacle grim by the bands
of the frost held aloft to the world!
Storm that had struck one to death in the sea, and
the storm that brought death to the one in the mast,
Cast me before you and dashed me a suppliant, begging
forgiveness and pity from you.
Then with a smile that was saintly, angelic, the golden
haired lady his hands took in hers;
Spake she, a glamour of holiness flashing and filling
the glorious blue of her eyes;—
“Now I can prove that no taint of the negro inhabits
the veins of your Rosaline Fay!

Free you are not from the promise you made her
a-down by the plum tree beneath the May moon."

Back to the Southland a-down by the bayou and into
old Houma town went they again.
All the world merrily laughing in gladness and
heaven itself with its gates wide ajar,
Flooding the air with the thrill of its music and scenting
the flowers with odors divine,
Teaching the birds how to warble new madrigals,
making the black bayou brighten and beam!
Through the green muscodine saw the old mellow moon
Victor and Rosaline singing again;
Heard the sweet harp at her fingers' touch thrilling,—
the angels of heaven the harmony hummed.
Ere had that yellow moon wasted in waning, than down
the long dusty road, down in the church,—
Stood they and uttered the vows they had whispered
beneath the fair May moon, beside the plum tree!

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